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U.S. orders probe into leak of CIA's anti-Qaddafi plan

By Bill Gertz
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

President Reagan has ordered an investigation into a leak about a CIA covert operation aimed at toppling the radical Libyan regime of Col. Muammar Qaddafi, the White House said yesterday.

Details of the anti-Qaddafi operation appeared yesterday in The Washington Post, which said it was aimed at neutralizing Libyan-backed assassinations, subversion and military intervention in Africa. The Post said the plan called for luring the Libyan dictator into a situation where anti-Qaddafi forces in the military and exiles in a third country could stage a coup.

The plan had been approved by President Reagan, CIA Director William Casey and Secretary of State George Shultz in a "finding" issued this fall, according to the Post.

The Post story quoted from several classified documents, including an intelligence assessment that said Col. Qaddafi supports about 30 insurgent, radical or terrorist groups worldwide, including some in Nicaragua, the Philippines and Lebanon.

"While in no way attributing any credence to the specific allegations and conclusions drawn in The Washington Post article on reports concerning Libya, the president is ordering an investigation of the disclosure of the U.S. intelligence documents cited in this news report in an effort to determine who is responsible for such disclosure and to take appropriate action," the White House announced in a statement yesterday.

Unauthorized disclosure of classified information is a felony under federal law and such investigations normally are conducted by the FBI.

Public controversy over U.S. operations against the radical Libyan leader dates to 1981. At that time The Washington Post reported that several members of the House Intelligence Committee had written to Mr. Reagan expressing concern about a U.S. covert operation in Africa later determined to be directed against Col. Qaddafi.

The Libyan government reacted with a statement saying pro-Qaddafi forces would seek the "physical liquidation" of American leaders beginning with Mr. Reagan. In response, the administration tightened security measures around Washington in anticipation of attacks by Libyan "hit squads."

Yesterday's report mentioned "initial resistance" from Committee Chairman Dave Durenberger, Minnesota Republican, and Patrick J. Leahy, Vermont Democrat, the two top members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, who wrote Mr. Reagan that the covert operation might involve assassination, a covert method prohibited by federal law under a presidential directive.

Neither senator could be reached for comment yesterday.

Washington Post assistant managing editor Bob Woodward, author of the article, would not comment on the pending leak investigation when reached by telephone yesterday.

The article referred to two other secret intelligence documents: a 29-page "Vulnerability Assessment" of Col. Qaddafi done by the CIA and other intelligence agencies dated June 18, 1984, and a special national intelligence estimate, "Libya's Khadafy: the Challenge to the United States and Western Interests," which was completed earlier this year.

Col. Qaddafi has purchased an estimated $20 billion worth of Soviet-made military equipment, an enormous buildup for a desert nation of only 3 million, according to U.S. officials. Libya's 2,400 Soviet tanks and 500 warplanes constitute a force larger than France's tank divisions and Britain's Royal Air Force respectively, they said.

According to broadcasts monitored outside Libya, Col. Qaddafi said in a speech last year marking the 14th anniversary of the closing of the U.S. Wheelus Air Base in Tripoli that "we are now in a position to export terrorism, liquidation and arson to the heart of America."

U.S. officials have labeled Col. Qaddafi a terrorist in response to evidence linking the Libyan regime to subversion and terrorism in 45 countries since 1969.

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